



A Remarkable Continuity between 1930s Ideas and Reconstruction after the Second World War

New Stained-Glass Windows in War-Damaged Churches in the Diocese of Namur (Belgium)

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The church renovation effort in the parishes of the Namur diocese after the Second World War seems to have taken place under the artistic control of one man, Canon André Lanotte (°1914 Bertrix). An art historian and archaeologist, Lanotte became a member of the Episcopal Commission for Religious Art of the Namur diocese in 1943. Beginning in the late 1930s he taught the sacred arts¹ at the Great Seminary of Namur, where he himself had studied, strongly focussing on a greater awareness of contemporary art. After the Ardennes Offensive in the winter of 1944-1945, he was promoted to secretary of the Episcopal Commission, in which capacity he was to supervise the reconstruction of damaged churches in the diocese. From 1946 as a member, and from 1954 as vice-president of the *Commission Royale des Monuments et des Sites* (Royal Commission for Monuments and Sites), he gave advice on submitted reconstruction projects. In this capacity, Canon Lanotte kept close contact with church councils and the priests and deacons of the parishes, many of whom asked his advice on the choice of an architect or artists. His proposals, based on personal preference, strongly influenced the composition of project teams. His seat on various, independently operating commissions gave him an ideal position from which to realise his vision.

From the year 1946 André Lanotte was responsible for the restoration or refurbishment of no fewer than 750 churches, war-damaged or not, in the diocese of Namur. Although he had the support of Bishop

André-Marie Charue (1898-1977, bishop 1941-1974), Lanotte frequently experienced opposition from conservative members of the clergy and the local administration.² In his many sharply formulated articles, however, he showed an unwavering position.³ His consistency of thought and critical attitude throughout were remarkable.

The most important policy points of André Lanotte were the rejection of revivalism, a regionalist and rational use of materials, the close collaboration between architect and artists, liturgical awareness and the quest for a beauty linked with economy. He called this attitude “sainement moderne”.⁴

In Contrast with Flanders

Thanks to Lanotte, the restoration of damaged churches in the diocese of Namur started immediately after the war, in accordance with a fully developed and coherent vision. No diocese in Flanders had a clergyman of his effectiveness at its disposal. Neither Flanders nor Brussels produced church refurbishments of any interest in the first five years after the war. Articles from that period, especially in the otherwise progressive periodical *L'Artisan et les Arts Liturgiques*, indicate that Flanders was still following pre-war guidelines.

After 1950, the achievements of the inter-war period were rejected in Flanders, a questioning attitude towards sacred art became symptomatic, and new things were being developed that would come to fruition only

11.1 The St Stephen's Church in Waha, renovated by Roger Bastin and Jacques Dupuis. The stained-glass windows and the polychromy in the choir are designed by Louis-Marie Londot, 1958. This picture was published in *Art d'Église* (1959, 221) in an article on the church of Waha by André Lanotte. [Louvain, KADOC: KYB154]

1 We distinguish the more general terms ‘religious’ or ‘Christian’ art from the more specific terms ‘sacred’, ‘church’ or ‘liturgical’ art, the latter three indicating a subgroup of the former. ‘Sacred art’ is art destined for the church interior, where it fulfils a well-defined liturgical function, and therefore synonymous with ‘liturgical’ or ‘church’ art. ‘Religious’ or ‘Christian’ art refers in its content to a certain religiosity, even when it is not intended to be part of a liturgical setting. Other authors have defined these terms differently. See for example Lemaire († 1954), *De toestand der godsdienstige kunst*; Idem, “L’Art Religieux” (1922), XVIII; Idem, *L’art religieux* (1939), 3; Idem, *L’architecture religieuse*, 2-3; Idem, *L’Art religieux et ses parasites*.

2 Antwerp, Archive of the author: Letter by André Lanotte to the author, 18.10.2000; Dulieu, “Contra. Le chanoine André Lanotte”, 21.

3 For the bibliography of André Lanotte, see Lanotte, *L’Art est toujours contemporain*, 153-158.

4 Lanotte, “Les églises dévastées”, 20.

after 1960. This probing, hesitant attitude permeated the exhibition 'Ars Sacra 58' in Louvain, for example.⁵ Neither its organisers nor anyone on the outside for that matter seem to have considered to any sufficient extent what concept should form the basis of an exhibition on sacred art, and opted for an approach that interpreted the term 'religious art' in the widest possible sense.⁶

One figure in West Flanders who deserves to be mentioned is the priest, archivist and librarian of the Bruges diocese, Michiel English (1885-1962), who gave guidance to artists after they had been commissioned. He was kept informed of liturgical developments through his contacts with the liturgist Camillus Aloysius Callewaert (1866-1943), who had founded the *Liturgische Kring van Brugge* (Bruges Liturgical Circle) in 1907. English was a member of the Royal Commission for Monuments and Sites, of the *Commissie van de Kerkelijke Kunstschaten* (Commission for Ecclesiastical Art Treasures) of the diocese and of the *Genootschap van Geschiedenis van Brugge* (Bruges Historical Society).⁷ After the Second World War he advised on restoration concepts and the choice of artists in the region. English pleaded for a high-quality modern church architecture, one that integrated regional elements. This made him criticise neo-Gothic architecture, in particular that of Baron Jean-Baptiste Bethune (1821-1894), because the style was identical in Flanders and Wallonia.⁸ Lastly, English wrote the iconographical programme for most new stained-glass windows in churches of the diocese. Although his ideals must have sounded progressive in post-war Flanders, his approach was outdated in a wider context. Through his influence, the conviction that an iconographic programme should be figuratively represented held sway much longer in West Flanders than elsewhere.

The Problem According to Lanotte

In contrast with the situation in Flanders, by 1946 Canon André Lanotte had elaborated his vision, following which he was to guide the restoration projects of churches and church interiors in the diocese.⁹ Although Lanotte's vision shows certain similarities with France, it took the French Dominicans several years to develop their progressive programme.¹⁰ It may be asked: what was the basis of the canon's views. From what sources did he draw inspiration? How could he start work, with the bells of the armistice still chiming as it were, in accordance with a fully developed programme?

Lanotte was convinced that post-war reconstruction was hindered not by dire financial circumstances as much as by a hostile artistic climate. He gave three main reasons for this, each connected to the question of art education: first, the fossilised academic art schools which still upheld the old dogmas of 'stylistic purity' and 'unity of style'; second, the abundance of commercial art studios, run by the alumni of the art schools, which produced (in his words) "cheap, worthless and inert Christian art" without taking account of contemporary art or reflecting it in anyway; and third, the indifference of the clergy to contemporary art.

These are problems that were already debated in the 1930s and that France also struggled with in the same period. Aesthetic education in general had been an issue in Belgium since the late 1930s and Lanotte personally addressed it as a teacher at the Great Seminary. In the interwar period the diocesan inspector Canon Fernand Crooy, who promoted the modernising of the sacred (applied) arts, wrote that an art education for seminary students was not a superfluous luxury.¹¹

5 *Ars Sacra 58*.

6 Bekaert, "Gewijde kunst", 132.

7 Strubbe, "Z.E.H. Michiel English", I, III, VI.

8 English, "Kloosterbouw in West-Vlaanderen", 188-189.

9 Lanotte, "Les églises dévastées".

10 See the periodical *L'Art Sacré* between 1945 and 1950.

11 Crooy, "La formation esthétique du jeune clergé".

Lanotte's Conceptual Basis

The canon's approach to the problem centres on five concepts: the importance of intuition in art and especially sacred art, the primacy of architecture in *Gesamtkunst*, the regionalisation of modernism, the potential of the applied arts and the value of art. If these issues were acute in the late 1940s and 1950s, they had also come up repeatedly in interwar debates.

Intuition

Lanotte thought, along the lines of the first half of the century, that a renewal of the sacred arts was desirable provided the link with tradition remained intact. Within the confines of the programme and of liturgy, artists and architects were to jointly develop a creative process based on their intuition - for it was intuition that created the lost success of tradition.¹² He called for a "counter-reformation against the false revival of the Middle Ages" that would regenerate faith in the possibilities of the present day.¹³

In their progressive periodical *L'Art Sacré*, the French Dominicans attacked the 'eclecticism and vulgarity' common in artistic circles, the lack of creativity and the mediocre output in the sacred arts during the post-war years, blaming it on academic art education. They, too, regarded intuition and sensitivity as necessary conditions for quality, especially the Dominican painter and stained-glass artist Marie-Alain Couturier (1897-1954) and the Dominican theologian Pie-Raymond Régamey, the two champions of the French post-war renewal of the sacred arts.¹⁴ [11.4] Like the French art historian Marcel Aubert (1884-1962), Couturier called intuition and sensitivity necessary conditions for quality.¹⁵ They both stated that these properties had defined the quality of mediaeval artistic production and that they were essential for

creating art objects with a personal character. Along the same lines, Régamey argued that common sense was being disrupted in art education institutions and that it was precisely this disruption that was causing pupils to lose their intuitive faculties. The result was a design practice that followed generalisations, systems and the commonplace instead of a personal path.¹⁶ It should be added that the term 'intuition' had played a central part in the ideas of the German theologian Romano Guardini (1885-1968), who guided the Liturgical Movement in 1920s Germany.¹⁷

The primacy of architecture

According to André Lanotte, the primacy of architecture was essential to the success of a church refurbishment project. The existing architecture and the architectural interventions set the guidelines for refurbishment. If artists were needed, they were chosen by the architect. The dialogue between client, architect and artists ultimately determined the quality of the project. To Lanotte, the choice of the right architect as the project leader was a guarantee for success.

Lanotte had put this view forward as early as 1946 and repeated it often.¹⁸ His selection criteria were a breadth of experience and adherence to high standards on a professional as well as a human level. The idea was clearly not unprecedented. The German modernist churches of the 1920s had also been realised by an artistic team coordinated by the architect, working in close collaboration and with a common commitment to economy. The close relationship between architect and artists also characterised the pre-war regionalist-modernist churches in Belgium and France. Finally, the World Exposition in Brussels in 1935 was used as a laboratory for testing a closer collaboration between artist and architect, an evolution that was supported by the government.¹⁹

12 Lanotte, "Présentation d'un effort diocésain", 26.

13 Ibidem, 25-26.

14 Régamey, "L'éducation artistique du clergé", 14; Idem, "Explication de la décadence", 243-244, 256-257, 265-267, 282.

15 D.A., "Le Congrès du Vitrail", 124. Marcel Aubert was a specialist on stained-glass windows. He wrote the survey *Le vitrail en France* which was published in Paris in 1946.

16 Couturier, "Ce que l'Église attend du Vitrail"; Idem, "La renaissance du vitrail", 436.

17 Bilo, *Romano Guardini*, 22.

18 Lanotte, "Les églises dévastées"; Idem, "Nous avons tous besoin de beauté"; *Art Sacré d'aujourd'hui*.

19 Devillez, *Kunst aan de orde*, 349.

Regionalist modernism

Lanotte's lasting appreciation of modernism, which does not seem to be influenced by German achievements, can be explained within a Belgian context. The economic crisis, the rejection of modernism by both left- and right-wing dictatorships and the mistrust in democratic countries of modernism's international ambitions had not led to the end of modernism but to a détente between modernism and tradition.²⁰ By the end of the 1930s, the context of Belgian church architecture, as in France, was characterised by a conjunction of regionalist tendencies (whether monumental or not), modern technologies and functionalist perceptions. Albeit on a small scale, this rapprochement between tradition and modernity was reflected in the attempts to create a more simple church architecture with a sober interior, adapted to the participation of 'common' people in liturgy, without loss of architectural quality.²¹

In the second half of the 1930s a national discourse developed on the theme of the applied arts and the arts and crafts. Much energy was spent on democratising the arts with the purpose of engaging them in the formation and propagation of national identity. The academic tradition was abandoned in favour of a more utilitarian approach among the arts and artists. On the other hand, art education was reformed to integrate artists and craftsmen more in society, and state commissions to artists were multiplied to improve the latter's social position. This policy, though differently applied, was pursued equally in left- and right-wing circles on the eve of the Second World War.²² *Sachlichkeit* in architecture did not seem to fit this new sensitivity, nor did it serve to express collective values. In church architecture the tendency did not altogether abolish functionalism, but the focus was shifted onto

'the social'. This implied a preference for traditional and regional idioms, in many cases accompanied by a new monumentality.²³

On the eve of the Second World War modernism returned to Belgian church architecture with the project of the Saint Alena Church in the Brussels Saint-Giles district (architects: Roger Bastin (1913-1986) and Jacques Dupuis (1914-1984)). This project, which fuses a modernist ethos with an almost Renaissance spatiality, perfectly reflects the situation just before the war. Design started in 1938 and construction in 1941. After the war the church was finished between 1945 and 1951.

According to André Lanotte, Belgium did not need to copy Europe's finest church architecture to achieve worthy results. Before organisation by crafts had disappeared and the academic art schools had taken over, 'measure, simplicity and discretion' already characterised the regional architecture of Namur and Luxemburg. In the 1930s these qualities again became central to the debate. Lanotte argued that with a more open and confident attitude it was possible to approach the ideal.²⁴ In a remarkable elaboration he embedded this attitude in local tradition and culture. He defended the search for new solutions, arguing that the traditional crafts in the region had always adopted new materials and methods under the guidance of architects and artists. A return to the crafts would, besides, be beneficial to the production chain of applied arts on a social level, as it would restore the lost honesty of naïve imagery.²⁵

- 20 Puttemans, "Roger Bastin", 9.
- 21 1951-1991. *Een tijdsbeeld*, 77.
- 22 Devillez, *Kunst aan de orde*, 12, 63, 70, 82, 87, 89, 91-92, 100, 107, 115, 118-120, 128, 153-154, 319.
- 23 Flouquet, "Architecture et décoration au Heysel"; Schmitz, *L'Architecture moderne en Belgique*, 30; Idem, "L'Architecture religieuse en Belgique"; Bekaert, *Hedendaagse architectuur in België*, 15.
- 24 Lanotte, "Présentation d'un effort diocésain", 26-27.
- 25 Ibidem, 26.
- 26 Aron, *La Cambre et l'architecture*, 28, 31, 36-37 and 51.
- 27 For example in the Cistercian abbey of Notre-Dame de Clairefontaine in Cordemoy (arch. Henry Vaes 1876-1945) built between 1930 and 1935, not only Eugene Yoors (1879-1975) and Jan Huet (1903-1976), the latter with a Saint-Luke background, worked on the decoration but also two pupils of the symbolist painter of the First Latem School Gustave van de Woestijne (1881-1947), namely Marcel Laforêt (1897-1974) and Geor(ges) de Vlaminck (1897-1980), alongside Irene Vander Linden (1897-1959). [11.2] The last three artists had been students at La Cambre. Piron, ed, *Belgische beeldende kunstenaars*, II, 794. More in Delvoy, Culot and Van Loo, *La Cambre*; Van Everbroeck, "Une abbaye moderne: Notre-Dame de Clairefontaine à Cordemoy"; Rivière, "L'Abbaye cistercienne de Cordemoy".
- 28 Dubois, *Albert van Huffel*, 100-101; Van de Perre, *Op de grens van twee werelden*, 32.

Local craft and new materials

The background of Lanotte's corrected form of modernism can be traced back to ideas relating to the applied arts which, from the 1930s, received much attention in a wide network connecting art-education, cultural and political circles. An important node in this web seems to have been the art school of the Benedictine monastery of Maredsous in the diocese of Namur. In these years Maredsous expanded its sphere of activity beyond Belgium's Catholic circles onto the political front, where it defended the cause of the applied arts. It did this in collaboration with teachers of the *Institut Supérieur des Arts Décoratifs* known in Dutch as the *Hoger Instituut voor Decoratieve Kunsten* of La Cambre in Brussels, which Henry Van de Velde (1863-1957) had founded in 1927 based on his experiences in the *Deutsche Werkbund* and in the *Weimar Kunstgewerbeschule*.

While the St Luke's schools represented so-called 'confessional' (i.e. Catholic) education and the art academies were the forum of traditional liberalism, La Cambre was to be an art school with far greater openness to social and technological changes. All three schools tended toward greater functionality in the production of the applied arts, but in the more traditional programme of the first two this tendency kept a lower profile. La Cambre emphasised the social aspect of art as it put rationality before sentiment, and kept historical styles as well as Art Nouveau at a distance. These choices stood an aesthetic and moral ideal, not a social, let alone socialist project. The belief in 'the dignity of everything that exists' led to the rational war on 'ugliness'. In practice this was an attempt to integrate artists in the chain of mass production. According to the institute, art and technology should not be socially disengaged, but the designer's artis-

tic freedom should come first at all times.

The programme was often given political connotations, but the man behind it was an aesthete more than a politician.²⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that artists from La Cambre circles readily accepted commissions for churches.²⁷

The director of the art school in Maredsous in the 1930s was and had been for nearly two decades Sébastien Braun (1881-1980), the Benedictine architect and advisor to the Thomist cardinal Désiré Mercier (1851-1926).²⁸ Braun, whom Lanotte

11.2 The cloister of the abbey of Notre-Dame de Clairefontaine in Cordemoy by architect Henry Vaes, 1930-1935. The stained-glass windows are designed by G. de Vlaminck. This picture was published in Marcel Schmitz's L'Architecture moderne en Belgique (1937). [Louvain, K.U.Leuven, Centrale bibliotheek: X19068 schm]



knew personally, pleaded for simplicity and economy as the essence of true beauty. He argued that the arts and crafts must develop in this spirit in order to create church interiors that complied with the latest liturgical standards. He did this publicly during the 6th Catholic Congress, which was held in Malines in September 1936. The theme was 'culture and art in a Christian context', addressing the lack of taste apparent in the decoration of churches. Braun proposed that 'modern industrialism' was to blame for the decline of the applied arts. A renewed appreciation of craftsmanship would remedy the situation, and would contribute at the same time to Christian society.²⁹

Another initiative, this time to enhance the collaboration between artists, craftsmen, art industry and dealers, was the *Kunst en Nijverheid* (Art and Industry) society, which came into being in July 1936 in Elsene. The programme was comparable to that of the *Deutsche Werkbund*, and was initiated by the gold- and silversmith and enamel-ist Félix Jacques (1897-1966) and Canon Fernand Crooy. Jacques was educated at Maredsous and taught the gold- and silver-smith's craft at La Cambre.³⁰ On the board were members of diverse political affiliations, among them vice-president Marcel Schmitz (°1885).³¹ Crooy had collaborated with Schmitz on the Pavilion of Religious Art in 1935 and organised salons for modern sacred art, not in museums but in liturgical settings.³² The renewal of Belgian art industry and its education was also the central theme during the preparations for the Paris World Exposition of 1937.

In July of that same year a new initiative was confirmed in Maredsous with the establishment of the Belgian division of the *Comité International des Artisanats, Métiers et Enseignements d'Arts* (International Committee of Artistic Artisanship, Crafts and Training Programmes). The initiator

was Dom Laurent Matthieu, then director of the Maredsous art school, who in collaboration with the ceramicist Henri Javaux (1892-1976) researched the causes of the decline of the applied arts and the potential for their renewal. Both considered craftsmanship more important than the industrialisation of the arts. The following year they organised an exhibition and a congress on the crafts and applied arts of the Namur region. One of the results was a call for renewing the applied arts and for stimulating popular education. A new service, the *Nationale Dienst voor de Kunstambachten en -nijverheden* (National Service for the Applied Arts and Industries), was set up. During the war the service concentrated on the revival of those Belgian traditional crafts related to regionalism and folklore. Maredsous too continued its engagement. On its initiative, provincial committees were set up which, during the occupation, were given ample opportunity to continue their activities. More and more they leaned toward folklore under the father figure of the autodidact ethnographer Albert Marinus (1886-1979), who himself was not opposed to industrial production.³³

In 1946 the monastery of Maredsous organised the first post-war international congress on church art. It was aimed at anyone in favour of renewing church art. The speakers were asked to deal with the question of how a true Christian art production might be assured in compliance with the demands of tradition, in this case meaning liturgy. The French periodical *L'Art Sacré* enthusiastically reported on the successful first issue of the *Journées d'art de Maredsous*.³⁴

In France, the restoration of the crafts was not explicitly linked to the use of new materials and techniques. It was, however, in Germany where the ideals of the *Deutsche Werkbund* bore fruit in the production of sacred art long before the Second World War.

29 Braun, "Le mobilier sacré des églises nouvelles", 158-159; Devillez, *Kunst aan de orde*, 97, 113-114.

30 Piron, ed, *Belgische beeldende kunstenaars*, I, 732.

31 The Catholic architect, urbanist and art critic Marcel Schmitz (°1885) was also director of the Department of Applied Art of the General World Exhibition in Brussels in 1935. According to Schmitz contemporary churches had to be modern but what ultimately counted was the spirituality of the building. *Algemene Wereldtentoonstelling van Brussel in 1935*, 24 and 52; Schmitz, *L'Architecture moderne en Belgique*, 23 and 29. [11.2]

32 Brilliant, *Art chrétien en France*, 240; Braun, "Le mobilier sacré des églises nouvelles", 146; Devillez, *Kunst aan de orde*, 97.

33 Devillez, *Kunst aan de orde*, 115, 322-324.

34 "Les problèmes de l'art sacré", 32.

In pre-war Belgium Lanotte's conviction was, not surprisingly, shared by Henry Van de Velde but not by Sébastien Braun. Someone else in line with Lanotte was Marius Renard, a socialist politician who specialised in the education of the 'artes minores'. He was at the same time director of the *École des Arts et Métiers* (School for Arts and Crafts) in Saint-Ghislain, a member of various associations dealing with art education and editor of the periodical *Savoir et Beauté*. Renard was convinced that technological progress was not the reason for the decay of the traditional applied arts.³⁵

Art is too expensive

Although he was aware of the financial limitations of the reconstruction effort, Canon Lanotte was convinced that spending a lot of money on one expensive but valuable work of art had more advantages than paying less for a number of cheap 'nice' objects. The canon was in favour of 'less but better work', guaranteed by the fact that it was not mass produced.³⁶ His view was supported by his acquaintance Sébastien Braun of the school of Maredsous who had already stated explicitly in 1936: "Rien de plus cher que le bon marché".³⁷ This was, of course, a stark contrast with the logic of public tender, which encouraged cheap, mass-produced 'churchware' by invariably selecting the cheapest offer.

The abundant acquisition of church decorations, including stained-glass windows, from commercial studios was, according to Lanotte, symptomatic of the first post-war years.³⁸ This explains why he disagreed with the guidelines defended in the introduction to the *Exposition nationale d'art religieux moderne* of 1947 held in the Brussels *Palais des Beaux-Arts*. Its purpose was to stimulate the renewal of Belgian religious art. But it was driven by a concern of the provincial

governments to increase the part of the art industry in the national economy. The economic perspective was openly stated as one of the most important on the agenda. Clearly the scale of the post-war reconstruction project played a crucial role in this.³⁹

Lanotte's view on this issue was shared by many. Before the war the *Deutsche Werkbund*, the Brussels art school of La Cambre and the Swiss artist Alexandre Cingria (1897-1945), and after the war the French Marie-Alain Couturier, were all convinced that mass production could only result in quality if it was designed by an artist.⁴⁰ With Braun and Lanotte, Couturier agreed that the 'art is too expensive' argument was a misleading one, and he advocated collaboration, involving lesser artists as well.⁴¹ Lanotte was quite explicit about the conditions under which such an operation was likely to succeed, but his position was not radical. In 1950 he proposed a solution combining cheap serial production and high art. He would address professionals and artists, and ask them to design objects that would not date, using only their sensitivity to form and the ideal of simplicity. This method would lead to high-quality liturgical objects produced in greater numbers. There were two conditions: the quest for 'timeless forms' should be continued, with the 'type' having to be renewed over and over again, and any form of commercial appropriation was to be avoided. Lanotte believed that the more church interiors were designed by authentic artists with differing convictions, the easier it would be to refute the idea that a representation appealing to most of the faithful could not have artistic value.⁴²

This conceptual background enabled Lanotte to establish a clear and convincing approach to the various problems he was confronted with, from conservation to abstraction, from interior decoration to stained-glass windows.

35 Devillez, *Kunst aan de orde*, 90.

36 Lanotte, "Les églises dévastées", 17-21.

37 Braun, "Le mobilier sacré des églises nouvelles", 158.

38 Lanotte, "Les églises dévastées", 17-21.

39 *Exposition nationale d'art religieux moderne*, 1-3.

40 Cingria and Claudel, *Der Verfall der Kirchliche Kunst*, 34.

41 Couturier, "Aux grands hommes, les grandes choses".

42 Lanotte, "Présentation d'un effort diocésain", 30.

Conservation

André Lanotte expressed a preference for projects that, while “without conscious archaeological preconceptions, without romantic clinging to regionalism”, still had an affinity with the old houses and churches of the region.⁴³ Lanotte condemned the laws subsidising the mere conservation of protected historic monuments. He criticised the procedures and argued that the Royal Commission should be allowed to independently appoint architects and contractors and to use available budgets at its own discretion.⁴⁴

According to Lanotte the conservation of historic buildings should respect the layers of time, so that the monument would in its diversity be an updated testimony of past and present. In his view, a historic church should conserve its outer appearance as much as possible, but its refurbishment should be adapted to contemporary demands.⁴⁵

This approach to monument care, which aims to develop and activate the significant layers of the monument, was widespread in Germany, where new stained-glass windows were already being introduced in historic churches after the First World War.

Canon Lanotte was to apply this attitude on a large scale in the many conservation projects under his supervision. The contrast between his views on the exterior and the interior of the historic church is particularly remarkable, not only in Belgium but in Western Europe. As an archaeologist, he was all too aware of the historical value of the churches in the region, but as a clergyman he favoured a church interior conceived according to the newest liturgical demands. This attitude reflected the combined ideal of conserving the fruits of tradition while recognising its living character. Twenty years later this concept would be central to the Charter of Venice.

Interior

Lanotte concentrated mainly on organising the church interior so that it could serve the church community symbolically and spatially, focussing on the celebration of the Eucharist. “Form, volume, rhythm and a living dialogue with the light” had to work together to create an ideal atmosphere that corresponded with the feelings of contemporary Catholics.⁴⁶ To achieve the right conditions for prayer, liturgy, community and artists needed to be aligned. This required a truthful community feeling devoid of individualism.⁴⁷

Lanotte was convinced that the primacy of architecture could only be re-established after the ‘false richness’ of existing church interiors was removed. In German pre-war projects as well as in the post-war programme of the French *Ars Sacra* movement, emptying overdecorated church interiors was considered a necessary element in creating an adequate space for the altar and the Eucharist.⁴⁸

An example of this is the Romanesque St Stephen’s Church in Waha, a monument protected since 18 August 1941 that subsequently suffered war damage.⁴⁹ Work on the design started in 1947.⁵⁰ Lanotte considered the main issue to be the renovation of the church interior in compliance with contemporary demands. He judged the project less problematic from an archaeological point of view, but from an aesthetic one extremely delicate. For this reason he chose an excellent architect who was well informed on the latest artistic developments.⁵¹ The design was made by Roger Bastin and Jacques Dupuis, the architects of the St Alena Church in Brussels. Their aim was the “rediscovery of an atmosphere that will show the value of the old building [...] while making it speak a contemporary language”.⁵² The refurbishment was explicitly based on liturgical

43 Idem, “Namur 1950-1960”, F.

44 Lanotte, “Présentation d’un effort diocésain”, 27.

45 Ibidem, 26-27.

46 Lanotte, “Namur 1950-1960”, 338 and F.

47 Idem, “Présentation d’un effort diocésain”, 31.

48 Ibidem.

49 ARA, Disaster Damage, E-8227-4: Waha.

50 On the history of the church, its archaeological and historical value, the funds acquired during the restoration and restoration techniques (except the rearrangement of the interior and stained-glass windows), see Mertens, “L’église Saint-Etienne à Waha”.

51 Buzet, Archives de Commission Diocésaine de l’Art Sacré de Namur: Dossier Waha: Copy of the letter by André Lanotte to the priest of Waha, 19.09.1947.

52 Ibidem: Copy of the letter by André Lanotte to Camille Bourgault, 30.08.1948.



11.3 The main altar of the St Stephen's Church in Waha, designed by Roger Bastin, 1958.
[Photograph by the author]

considerations, giving particular importance to the position of the altar in the space. It was designed as a floating element, hovering above the floor of the nave, making it a real 'eye-catcher'. [11.3] The commission for the stained-glass windows was given to Louis-Marie Londot (°1924), the painter and stained-glass artist who at the time was collaborating with Lanotte on many projects.⁵³ [11.1] The geometrical compositions of the windows generate the desired colour and light effects by using pigmented antique glass of varying thickness and without any painting. The general approach in the restoration of the St Stephen's Church overturned the so-called 'archaeological mentality'. The attitude of merely repairing and conserving a monument was replaced by one of actively and assertively setting every-

thing valuable in a favourable light and at the same time adapting the building to contemporary worship "[...] to set up an accurate scale of value for architecture, furniture and paintings; to design the necessary arrangements for the place of worship, providing it does not run counter to contemporary tendencies; not to make a museum out of it; to refuse to remain 'neutral' but to foster a sensitivity for hierarchy and the ensemble of things; to realise that spirituality only becomes reality by taking on colour and form, that the spirit fulfils its mission only in the meeting and agreeing of the demands of sensitivity and of the material".⁵⁴

In the case of the refurbishment projects in his diocese Lanotte was not looking for artistic genius. Even in 1950, he was very critical of the attitude of the French

53 More over Londot in Richardeau, *Louis-Marie Londot*.

54 Lanotte, "Waha", H. (Translation by the author).



11.4 Stained-glass window (detail) designed by Jacques Le Chevallier for the parish church in Ham-sur-Sambre, 1948-1949. This picture was published in a special issue of L'Art d'Église (19 (1950) 2-3, 55) on the diocese of Namur, written by André Lanotte. [Louvain, KADOC: KYC371]

Dominicans, who chose to work with renowned artists irrespective of their religious convictions. Lanotte felt this approach threatened to turn sacred art into something aristocratic and churches into museums. A church interior conceived as a museum would lack the spontaneity it required as a living centre of prayer. Like others before him in the 1930s, Lanotte preferred to work with local and practising craftsmen who did

not claim to be artists or geniuses. On the other hand he opposed protectionism, and if necessary he looked abroad for the right person.⁵⁵ On three occasions he asked a master from France to create stained-glass windows and frescos in his diocese: Marie-Alain Couturier, who worked on the Sacred Heart Church in Saint-Servais, Jacques Le Chevallier (1896-1987) on the parish church in Ham-sur-Sambre [11.4] and Maurice Rocher (1918-1995) on the church in Hargimont.

Stained-glass Windows

Canon Lanotte emphasised that a church interior constituted a unity in which the question of stained-glass windows was extremely important. The issues he addresses in his opinions on stained-glass windows echo his wider concerns: commercial workshops, the relationship between designer and client, the wish for a contemporary and living art and the pains of bureaucracy.⁵⁶ His correspondence shows that he closely followed developments in stained-glass window commissions and proves that he worked to put his convictions into practice.⁵⁷

He argued that the working procedure needed to be adjusted. The first designated should be the designing artists instead of the workshops. Ideally, of course, the artist and maker should be one and the same. If this were not the case, the choice of the executing workshop should be left to the designer. When a project was state subsidised, however, the decision would be made by public tender. By contrast, Lanotte, together with the Stained Glass Department of the National Commission of Applied Arts, zealously defended the principle of fixed prices. He argued in vain that in order to improve the quality of projects it was necessary to eliminate financial competition and to

decide only on artistic criteria.⁵⁸ The amendment to the law was never passed.

In France, Couturier had criticised the nineteenth-century division of labour in workshops for stained-glass windows, influenced by the laws of supply and demand, as early as in 1939.⁵⁹ In this system one man made the design, a second cut the pieces from sheets of coloured glass, a third painted them, a fourth craftsman fired them, a fifth one put the glass in lead and someone else was needed to set the window in place. Like Lanotte, Couturier saw in this the reason for the immense output of characterless stained-glass windows. Though Lanotte did not know the pre-war texts of Couturier, the parallel is striking. It indicates a comparable situation in both countries. In Germany on the other hand, the separation between designer and maker was also common practice, but they always worked in close collaboration. Lanotte found no artist in his diocese who fulfilled the ideal of designer-maker. Flanders, in contrast, did have such an artist in the person of the autodidact Michel Martens (1921-2006).

Abstraction

Lanotte did not mind the gradual disappearance of stained-glass windows in the tradition of *'La bible du pauvre'*. He welcomed the tendency toward abstraction, perceiving it largely as the continuation of the process started by Cubism. But abstraction was, in his eyes, not the only possible road. With a freer interpretation of tradition, a renewal was possible in which recognisable symbols replaced the narrative character of traditional iconographic programmes. This is illustrated by the stained-glass windows of the church of Our Lady and St Peter in Gembeles, designed by Simon Steger and put in place by the begin-



11.5 Stained-glass window designed by Simon Steger for the church of Our Lady and St Peter in Gembeles, 1956-1959. [Photograph by the author]

ning of 1959. [11.5] Following the wish of the parish priest the twelve windows of the nave feature one coherent theme.⁶⁰ The Old Testament Canticle of the Hebrews in the fiery furnace from the Book of Daniel was chosen. The images were not based on scenes as starting points, but on building blocks or symbols of the text, such as animals, birds or a cornfield.⁶¹ Steger wanted to treat them in a decorative and poetic way. He developed the elements per individual window. He did not communicate a narrative story with these motives, but rather his personal state of mind when contemplating the theme of the commission. There is no linear continu-

55 Idem, "Présentation d'un effort diocésain", 32.

56 Ibidem, 29, 52-57.

57 Buzet, Archives de la Commission Diocésaine de l'Art Sacré de Namur. Every parish has its own dossier.

58 "Afdeling van het gebrandschilderd raam"; Lanotte, "Présentation d'un effort diocésain", 29.

59 Couturier, "La renaissance du vitrail", 436-438; Idem, "Problèmes de verriers".

60 Buzet, Archives de la Commission Diocésaine de l'Art Sacré de Namur: Dossier Gembeles: Letter by the priest of Gembeles, L. Lejeune to André Lanotte, 26.10.1955.

61 Ibidem: Note by André Lanotte on a letter by Simon Steger to André Lanotte, 18.08.1955.

62 Lanotte, "Namur 1950-1960", 357.

63 Debuyst, "L'Art religieux moderne en Belgique", 194-195.

64 Dulieu, "Contra. Le chanoine André Lanotte".

ity between the windows. André Lanotte felt that Steger's figurative windows illustrated how an old theme could be unexpectedly reborn by the inspiration of contemporary painting, in this case Cubism. The knowledge of and familiarity with contemporary secular painting seemed to have set free an old Biblical theme in a new way.⁶²

At the same time Lanotte preferred stained-glass windows, which were first of all instrumental in shaping the natural lighting of the liturgical space, to be non-figurative. Thanks to their non-cerebral character and their decorative power, non-figurative stained-glass windows were considered especially apt in shaping a place of prayer.

This preoccupation also fed Lanotte's interest in polychromatic church interiors. Louis-Marie Londot decorated many churches with

techniques including polychromy, such as the parish church in the village of Baclain (1955). [11.6]

Once again, Lanotte's architecturally based conception of stained-glass windows and of non-figurative art in church interiors lay along lines expounded by Couturier before the war and Régamey, mainly after 1945, in the periodical *L'Art Sacré*. Germany had undergone a more natural passage to abstraction, in fact already present in their vegetal and decorative compositions of the 1920s.

Conclusion

Authors who discussed the activities of Canon André Lanotte situated him either near the French *Ars Sacra* movement, whose ideas they say he adopted and adjusted to the Belgian context, or as a brilliant person who created a coherent programme out of the blue through an exceptional feel for the needs of the time.⁶³ Since the revaluation of nineteenth-century revivalism in recent historical and art-historical research, the refurbishments under his supervision have also been labelled as iconoclastic.⁶⁴

My research indicates that during the first post-war years the canon showed no particular interest in German church architecture, and that he was unaware of the French *Ars Sacra* movement until 1946. Many of the issues discussed in *L'Art Sacré*, the periodical of the French Dominicans, correspond with problems that confronted Lanotte. He could have found support for some of his activities through these texts. However, in many other aspects, to begin with his attitude towards architecture, he followed routes fundamentally different from the French. On the whole Lanotte's vision was much closer to the pre-war or German approach, although it would be too much to suggest a real influence.

11.6 Polychromy of the parish church of Baclain by Louis-Marie Londot, 1955.
[Photograph by the author]



I argue that he restored the primacy of architecture and attention to regional and traditional craftsmanship, ideas characteristic of the years of his education and professional start. I also propose that he had an insight into the post-war artistic climate and into changing liturgical conceptions that allowed him to imbue an eclectic ground with a feeling for economy. His genius, if we can call it that, lies in the construction of a unique and effective synthesis of a pre-war body of ideas and post-war endeavours. His uncomplicated attitude towards tradition and modernity, his multiple professions as archaeologist, art historian and theologian, and in addition his personal artistic taste, all contributed to the success of his projects. The gradual shift of stained-glass windows towards 'elements of a lesser god' in some church interiors in the Namur diocese is remarkable in any respect. Their only remaining *raison d'être* was their influence on the light of the church interior, even when figurative representation was still applied. In this way they finally fulfilled the pre-war wish for stained-glass windows that would simply create a church-like atmosphere.

The content of Lanotte's work paved the way for the conclusions on sacred art of the Second Vatican Council, held between 1962 and 1965, to which his bishop Mgr Charue actively contributed.⁶⁵ But Lanotte was not only a forerunner of the Council. In the field of monument protection he had been acting according to the same principles for twenty years, when they were adopted in the Charter of Venice in 1964. Above all in his church refurbishments, he applied the guidelines, still valid now, more consistently than even their co-author, the Belgian architecture historian and architect Raymond M. Lemaire (1921-1997). While Lemaire considered a church only as architecture, Lanotte perceived the whole, including the interior decoration. His projects always restored

the furniture and stained-glass windows, or designed them in parallel with the architecture. What is striking and exceptional is that this most effective contributor to the renewal of the sacred arts was neither an artist, nor an architect or politician, but a clergyman.

65 Declerck and Soetens, *Carnets conciliaires de l'évêque de Namur A.-M. Charue*.